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TAGS: [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: FM SALLOUKH DISCUSSES MEHLIS AND
LEBANON-SYRIA

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh was enthusiastic in his support of the Mehlis report findings, but was reluctant to send a Lebanese representative to next Monday's planned UNSC meeting of foreign ministers. He considers this meeting strictly an affair between Syria and the Security Council. With respect to next week's anticipated UNSC resolution calling on Syria to cooperate fully with the on-going investigation, Salloukh cautioned against imposition of sanctions and urged patience. He soft-pedaled the October 25 border incident in which a Lebanese army civilian employee was killed by hostile fire from Syria, and again urged patience. He insists that Lebanon and Syria are making progress on normalizing relations, despite the absence to date of specific actions. End summary.

12. (C) Lebanese FM Fawzi Salloukh, joined by aide Rami Mourtada, received the Ambassador and poloff on October 26. Salloukh, as a member of the Shia community, owes his position to support from Hizballah and Amal's political monolith. But in recent weeks, and particularly following the September New York Core Group meetings on Lebanon, he has displayed an independent streak in defending the programs of Prime Minister Siniora, and doing little to affiliate himself with the Shia leaders of Hizballah and Amal.

UN DEBATE ON THE MEHLIS FINDINGS

13. (C) FM Salloukh declared that Boutros Assaker, the MFA's #2 official now in New York, had delivered an effective explanation of the situation in the country to the UNSC the previous day. The foreign minister indicated he had sent Assaker a detailed letter of instruction that corresponded to decisions reached in last Saturday's meeting of the Council of Ministers and was pleased that his government's position, as well as its request for an extension of the Mehlis Commission, had been well received by the Council. Salloukh said the GOL was now awaiting the response of the Security Council.

14. (C) Salloukh informed the Ambassador the Cabinet was unified in its approach. He said the government believes that although Detlev Mehlis had diligently uncovered a significant amount of critical information, the investigation was not complete, and -- in a surprising comment -- that an extension even beyond December 15 may be necessary. Commenting on the unanimity of the Cabinet, he stated, "All of us are looking for the truth."

15. (C) When asked how he thought the international community could best compel Syria to cooperate, FM Salloukh (who is not unsympathetic to Syria) recommended a strongly worded resolution that spells out what was required of the Syrian regime. But he also advised that sanctions would not work. Salloukh insisted the Syrian regime in the last few days had signaled it was now willing to cooperate fully with

the investigation, but he also admitted that there has been "conflict" among the Syrian ruling elite, particularly between Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Shara and his deputy, Walid al-Mu'allim. But even with this internal Syrian debate, Salloukh maintained things could be resolved to the satisfaction of the Security Council.

AWAITING THE LARSEN REPORT

¶16. (C) Concerning the imminent release of the Roed-Larsen report on implementation of UNSCR 1559, FM Salloukh rather anxiously asked the Ambassador what it might contain. Salloukh suggested that the situation in Lebanon had improved significantly over the past year, perhaps in an effort to blunt the expected criticism from the UNSYG's report.

¶17. (C) When asked whether the GOL would be sending a official to present Lebanon's case in next week's meeting of foreign ministers, Salloukh said he would simply follow the instructions of the Council of Ministers, which as of this time had not made a decision on the matter. While stating, "If the Cabinet says to go, I will go...", he also said he believes Monday's meeting was really between Syria and the Security Council members. "We have said our piece and made our request."

NORMALIZING LEBANESE - SYRIAN RELATIONS

¶18. (C) In response to the Ambassador's concern that Syria did not appear to be taking any positive action to improve Lebanese-Syrian relations, Salloukh maintained that Syria wanted normal relations, but because of international pressure found it "difficult" to take concrete steps, such as showing an interest in demarcation of the Lebanese-Syrian border or discussions to establish normal diplomatic relations.

¶19. (C) Salloukh rebuffed the Ambassador's observation that Syria usually represented a one-way street for Lebanon. He pointed out that commercial border traffic had recently improved and that "infiltration" across the borders appeared to have fallen off during the last two weeks. But he acknowledged these steps were not enough, and conceded that Lebanon had to insist that Syria discuss normal relations, and do it soon.

¶10. (C) Salloukh suggested that "perhaps after New York," Syrian and Lebanese officials could meet to begin a dialogue on the mutual interests of the two countries. Displaying an interesting empathy with the Syrian predicament, Salloukh argued that issues such as border demarcation could not be discussed while Syria was the focus of both the Mehlis and Larsen reports.

¶11. (C) As he had preented earlier, the foreign minister argued for patience, saying, "we inherited a large hill, we have to start removing these heaps until we reach the paved road." He believed the fact that Syria is also suffering from poor relations with its close neighbor Lebanon would compel the Syrian government to seek normalized relations.

INCIDENTS ON THE BORDER AND IN AIN EL-HELWEH

¶12. (C) The foreign minister briefly addressed two incidents: last week's firefight just outside the large Ain el-Helweh refugee camp in Sidon and the October 25 shooting which killed an Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) civilian surveyor near the Lebanon-Syria border in the southern Biq'a Valley. Salloukh said he had just met with Sidon-based MP Bahiya Hariri (sister of former PM Rafik Hariri) who assured him that tensions had eased and that the civil authorities, as well as representatives from Amal and Hizballah, were effectively dealing with the matter. There were still two suspects wanted by the authorities, but Salloukh said he

believed the issue was being resolved. With regard to the fatal border shooting on October 25, Salloukh unconvincingly said he only knew what he read in the newspapers that morning. He admitted it was "not a good indication," but indicated the facts were murky. "It is a pity and we are investigating." He did say it illustrated the need to settle the border, and not just in the Biq'a, because "there are many places where the border is in question."

¶13. (C) Salloukh finished the meeting with an observation it was too early to decide whether an international tribunal would be required to adjudicate cases resulting from the Mehlis investigation. As with other matters, he counseled patience.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Foreign Minister Salloukh supports Mehlis' findings, he has requested continued UN support to Lebanon's judiciary and security services, and he indicated a desire for Syrian cooperation with the investigation as well as normal relations between the two countries. But he also displayed passivity toward compelling immediate Syrian movement on a number of issues, and specifically, early discussions on normalizing relations. He would not be a strong ally in 10/31 discussions in New York. End comment.

FELTMAN